

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0671

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PORG OAU MP
SUBJECT: RAMGOOLAM'S PERFORMANCE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE OAU

SUMMARY. AS PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM'S YEAR OF TENURE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU) DRAWS TO A CLOSE, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO ASSESS HIS PERFORMANCE IN THAT POSITION DURING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS. HE HAS BEEN A HIGHLY INACTIVE CHAIRMAN, PARTLY OWING TO HIS OWN DISINCLINATION TO GET INVOLVED, PARTLY BECAUSE HE HAS NOT BEEN ASKED TO DO MUCH, AND PARTLY BECAUSE THE PROBLEMS HE MIGHT HAVE DEALT WITH APPEAR SO INTRACTABLE AS TO INVITE NON-INVOLVEMENT. THE ORGANIZATION ITSELF HAS NOT PASSED THROUGH ANY MAJOR CRISES (UNLESS ONE CONSIDERS THE BENIN AFFAIR MAJOR), WHICH IS A REFLECTION OF THIS NON-INVOLVEMENT AND WHICH MAY ALSO INDICATE THE OAU'S INABILITY TO ENGAGE ITSELF IN THE MAJOR INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND DISPUTES OF THE CONTINENT. RAMGOOLAM HIMSELF IS PROBABLY JUST AS HAPPY TO BE HANDING THE OFFICE ON TO SOMEONE ELSE, HAPPY THAT HE HAD HIS TURN AT BEING THE SYMBOLIC "NUMBER ONE" IN AFRICA, AND EVEN HAPPIER THAT HE WAS ABLE TO AVOID BECOMING EMBROILED IN A MAJOR CONTROVERSY. END SUMMARY.

1. RAMGOOLAM ACQUIRED THE POST OF OAU CHAIRMAN WITH SOME
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MINOR DIFFICULTY, OVER THE OBJECTIONS OF HIS PREDECESSOR, IDI AMIN, WHO FELT, OR AT LEAST ARGUED, THAT MAURITIUS WAS IN A SOMEHOW ILLEGITIMATE POSITION, WITH QUEEN ELIZABETH AS CHIEF OF STATE AND RAMGOOLAM A MERE PRIME MINISTER. BUT NO OBJECTIONS WERE RAISED IN THE END AT THE OAU SUMMIT HELD IN MAURITIUS IN JULY 1976, AND RAM RECEIVED THE BATON FROM AMIN. SINCE THAT TIME RAMGOOLAM HAS DONE PRACTICALLY NOTHING

IN OR THROUGH THE OFFICE OF OAU CHAIRMAN.

2. SOME PEOPLE HERE BELIEVE THAT RAM NEVER DID INTEND TO DO ANYTHING WITH THE JOB, BUT WANTED IT MERELY TO ADD TO HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND THAT OF HIS COUNTRY, WHICH IS SMALL, DISTANT, NOT VERY AFRICAN AND CERTAINLY NOT IN THE MAINSTREAM OF AFRICAN CONTINENTAL POLITICS. OTHERS SAY HIS MOTIVES FOCUSED MORE ON DOMESTIC POLITICS, IN THAT HE WAS FACING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BY THE END OF 1976 AND WANTED TO DISARM THE OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), WHICH ADVOCATES A MUCH MORE MILITANT AND RADICAL POLICY ON AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS. IT IS PROBABLY TRUE THAT BEING OAU CHAIRMAN HELPED RAMGOOLAM DOMESTICALLY, THOUGH HE ALREADY ENJOYED A GREAT DEAL OF PERSONAL PRESTIGE WITHIN THE COUNTRY AS THE MAN WHO LED IT TO INDEPENDENCE. CONTRARY TO SOME EXPECTATIONS, RAM'S SERVICE AS OAU CHAIRMAN DID NOT MATERIALLY RADICALIZE MAURITIAN FOREIGN POLICY; IN FACT, IT HARDLY CHANGED PERCEPTIBLY DURING THE YEAR. IF ANYTHING, RAM'S LEADERSHIP OF THE OAU MAY HAVE SLIGHTLY MODERATED AFRICA'S OVERALL POSTURE INSTEAD OF AFRICA RADICALIZING MAURITIUS'.

3. RAM HAS BEEN ANYTHING BUT AN ACTIVIST OAU CHAIRMAN, ESPECIALLY IN COMPARISON WITH AMIN, WHICH MOST PEOPLE WOULD CONSIDER A BLESSING. IT IS DIFFICULT TO RECALL A SINGLE MAJOR INITIATIVE HE HAS TAKEN ON BEHALF OF THE OAU. THE 1976 SUMMIT IN EFFECT INSTRUCTED HIM TO ARRANGE AN EXTRA-CONFIDENTIAL

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ORDINARY SUMMIT TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF WESTERN SAHARA, BUT HE WAS NOT ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH EVEN THAT MISSION. NO DOUBT THE REASON WAS THAT AT LEAST TWO OF THE PRINCIPALS-- MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA -- WANTED NO PART OF SUCH A MEETING, AND WITHOUT THEIR COOPERATION IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO HOLD ONE. RAMGOOLAM DID SPEAK OUT FORCEFULLY ONCE, IN SUPPORT OF THE ZAIRE GOVERNMENT OVER THE INVASION OF SHABA PROVINCE BY KATANGA GENDARMES (PORT LOUIS 295). CURIOUSLY ENOUGH THIS WAS AN OCCASION WHEN THE MEMBERS OF THE OAU WERE CERTAINLY DIVIDED INTO AT LEAST TWO OPPOSING CAMPS ON THE QUESTION, YET RAMGOOLAM DID NOT HESITATE TO TAKE A STAND, MOST PROBABLY WITHOUT CONSULTING VERY MANY OTHER AFRICAN LEADERS.

4. THE FOCUS OF CONTINENTAL POLITICS DURING THE PAST YEAR WAS OF COURSE ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN, PARTICULARLY RHODESIA, AND WITH THE U.S. AND THE UK TAKING THE LEAD ON THIS ISSUE, THE OAU FELL INTO A BACK-SEAT ROLE. FURTHERMORE, THE OAU HAS IN EFFECT "ASSIGNED" THIS PROBLEM TO THE FIVE FRONT-LINE STATES-- A DECISION CONFIRMED AT THE 1976 OAU SUMMIT -- WHICH PERMITS THE OAU CHAIRMAN TO STAY OUT OF THE MIDDLE OF IT. IN ANY CASE MAURITIUS AND ITS LEADER ARE SOMEWHAT INHIBITED FROM TAKING INITIATIVES ON SOUTHERN AFRICA BECAUSE OF MAURITIUS' AMBIGUOUS

RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. WHILE GOM LEADERS INCLUDING RAMGOOLAM NEVER HESITATE TO DENOUNCE APARTHEID AND SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POLICIES, MAJRITIUS' VOICE IS MUTED BY THE LINKS IT HAS MAINTAINED WITH THAT COUNTRY WHICH MAKE IT VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM, DESPITE THE FACT THAT A NUMBER OF OTHER AFRICAN STATES MAINTAIN EVEN CLOSER TIES WITH PRETORIA. MAURITIUS IMPORTS SOME ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES FROM SOUTH AFRICA, SELLS MOST OF ITS TEA PRODUCTION THERE, AND SOUTH AFRICA IS ITS SECOND MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF TOURISTS (AFTER REUNION ISLAND) AND THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE FOR THE LUXURY END OF THE TOURIST MARKET. THOUGH THE GOM CONSTANTLY REPEATS THAT IT WILL APPLY ECONOMIC SANCTIONS TO SOUTH AFRICA JUST AS SOON AS THE UN OR THE OAU MANDATE THEM, IT CAN HARDLY TAKE A MILITANT OR LEADERSHIP POSITION ON

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SOUTHERN AFRICA, AS THE OPPOSITION MMM TAKED DELIGHT IN POINTING OUT.

5. MANY MAURITIANS FEEL REMOTE FROM AFRICA SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS PHYSICALLY AND WONDER WHY RAM GOT SO INVOLVED WITH THE OAU. WHILE THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT MAURITIUS NEEDS TO ASSOCIATE WITH AFRICA FOR ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL REASONS, THEY BELIEVE THE COUNTRY OUGHT TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM THE MORE RADICAL POLITICAL CAUSES ESPONSED BY MANY AFRICAN STATES. THIS POINT OF VIEW IS OF COURSE NOT SHARED BY THE MMM, WHICH IDENTIFIES WITH THE MOST RADICAL STATES IN AFRICA, ESPECIALLY WITH MOZAMBIQUE, ANGOLA, TANZANIA, ALGERIA, LIBYA AND MADAGASCAR.

6. IT IS CLEAR THAT DURING THE PAST YEAR -- AND PERHAPS ALWAYS-- THE OAU SECRETARIAT AND SECRETARY GENERAL ETEKI PARTICULARLY PLAY A MUCH LARGER ROLE IN THE OAU AFFAIRS THAN THE CURRENT CHAIRMAN, WHOEVER HE IS. ETEKI WORKS AT IT FULL TIME AND CONTROLS THE MACHINERY, EVEN AT THE SUMMITS AND THE MINISTERIAL DISCUSSION. RAMGOOLAM ONCE COMPLAINED TO ME THAT HIS SPEECH FOR DELIVERY AT THE COLOMBO NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT HAD BEEN DRAFTED BY THE OAU SECRETARIAT IN ADDIS WITHOUT CONSULTATION AND THEN SIMPLY MAILED HERE FOR HIM TO USE. RAM SAID THE DRAFT SPEECH WAS TOO LONG, VERBOSE AND "IMPOSSIBLE," AND HE HAD HAD TO REWRITE IT ON THE WAY TO COLOMBO. WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT RAM'S EXCHANGES WITH THE OAU SECRETARIAT DURING THE YEAR, BUT THEY CANNOT HAVE BEEN FREQUENT OR VERY FRUITFUL, AND SO FAR AS WE KNOW THERE WAS NOT PERSONAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN RAMGOOLAM AND ETEKI DURING THE YEAR. BOTH FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER AND MAURITIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UN RAMPHUL ACTED AS OAU SPOKESMEN DURING THE PAST YEAR, BUT NEITHER ONE CAN BE SAID TO HAVE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE ON BEHALF OF THE OAU.

7. IN CONCLUSION IT CAN BE SAID THAT RAMGOOLAM LIKED THE HONOR

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OF BEING OAU CHAIRMAN, HE PROBABLY NEVER INTENDED TO DO MUCH WITH THE OFFICE, IN FACT HE DIDN'T, AND WAS HAPPY THAT CIRCUMSTANCES DIDN'T CAUSE HIM TO GET TOO INVOLVED. IT SERVED HIS PURPOSE OF UNDERCUTTING HIS DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO SOME DEGREE, ALTHOUGH AT THE SAME TIME IT MADE HIM VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM THAT HE ACCOMPLISHED NOTHING AS OAU CHAIRMAN.

8. THE FOLLOWING IS AN ASSESSMENT OF HIS PERFORMANCE DRAWN UP IN MARCH BY THE MAURITIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION, A LEFT OF CENTER OPPOSITION PARTY THAT DID POORLY IN THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS BUT WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE GIVEN A FAIR IF CRITICAL SUMMARY OF RAM'S YEAR AS OAU LEADER: QUOTE. THE PRESIDENCY OF THE OAU BROUGHT NOTHING TO MAURITIUS. NEVER HAS A CHAIRMAN OF THE OAU BEEN SILENT, WHETHER IT HAS BEEN A MATTER OF VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA OR IN UGANDA. NEVER HAS A CHAIRMAN OF THE OAU BEEN SO LITTLE CONSULTED BY HIS SECRETARIAT. IN FACT, SINCE THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF JULY 1976, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OAU HAS NOT BEEN VISITED BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL. AND YET, PROBLEMS ARE NOT LACKING IN AFRICA -- WHETHER IN EAST AFRICA OR IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, WHETHER BETWEEN MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA. IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT THE POLICY OF SILENCE WHICH HAS PAID OFF SO WELL FOR THE HEAD OF THE LABOR PARTY HAS DONE SO FOR THE CHIEF -- THE TITULAR CHIEF -- OF AFRICA, WHICH IS TROUBLED BY SO MANY PROBLEMS. END QUOTE.

KEELEY

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